

Woolastook Presbytery

The Pastoral Care and Support Committee of Woolastook Presbytery, the equivalent of an Oversight Committee, met six times since the report of March 3013. It has also met jointly with the Pastoral Relations Committee on three occasions. Such joint meetings arose from a concern of the Pastoral Care and Support Committee that problems can occur when the outcome of the Joint Needs Assessment process does not accurately reflect the true wishes or nature of the congregation or pastoral charge, as well as conflicts which can occur when clergy have unrealistic expectations of how their passions and personality will truly meld with the congregation or pastoral charge. In light of this, it was useful to discuss the processes and constraints of work of the Pastoral Relations Committee. Occasional joint airing of issues apparent from the work or workings of the two committees has been of value. However, much of what each of these committee does is distinct, and, of course, confidential.

These joint meetings resulted in the option of a member of the Pastoral Care and Support Committee either being added to, or taking the place of, one of the usual two persons assigned, through the Pastoral Relations Committee, to the Joint Needs Assessment and Joint Search process. Also arrangements are now in place to have a member from the Pastoral Relations Committee added to the Triennial-Visit team on occasion. Another new feature of the Triennial-Visit, is to ask the Pastoral Charge to have their record books available for perusal by a member of the Archival Team from the Heritage and Resources Committee during the time of the visit. This will mean that the books do not have to leave the pastoral charge and joint travel can be arranged.

There has been one major change among the Pastoral Charges of Woolastook presbytery. The Plaster Rock-Grand Falls-Riley Brook Pastoral Charge began a trial shared Ministry with the Anglican Parish of The Tobique. The Anglican Priest, the Rev. Amanda Longmore began shared Ministry there in July. Her husband, the Rev. Steven Longmore now serves the Andover-Kincardine Pastoral Charge.

Members of the Pastoral Care and Support Committee completed six Triennial Visits. Reports of the visits were discussed and approved during meetings of the committee, and copies were sent back to the Minister, Ministry and Personnel Committee, and Board or equivalent, as appropriate. Seven visits are planned for this spring. Two of these are held over from the fall. Our aim has been to conduct ten Triennial Visits each year, as we have 30 Pastoral Charges. We hold off from visiting when pastoral charges are in the Joint Needs Assessment/Joint Search process or when new ministers have been in place for less than about six months.

The most recent meeting of the committee was for discussion following our readings of the Annual Reports submitted by the Pastoral Charges. The reports are sent to the Secretary of Presbytery by 15 February, or are turned in at the February meeting of Presbytery held on the last Thursday of the month. This leaves us with almost two weeks for reading of reports before our mid-March meeting. Each Charge submits three copies of their report. One stays with the Secretary, the other two are distributed to two members of the committee. This year, 29 of the possible 30 reports were received in time. Each committee member had about seven reports to read. At our day-long meeting, our “Festival of Annual Reports”, we hear comments in turn from the two readers of each report, and

discuss these in light of other things known about the Charge. It is a long process, but it is one that we value highly. It is informative, and keeps us abreast of how each Charge is doing.

In general, it can be said that the reports are more complete than in the past. That is, one is able to acquire more of a feel for how the Spirit of God is active, working, and moving in the lives of the congregations. In general, we see plenty of evidence that the Spirit of God is active through worship, programs, and outreach. However, a connection between what has been done in the past year and naming a direction for where the congregations appear to be heading in the near future is seldom evident. We rejoice when we find such forward thinking. In like manner, there is an evident need for Presbytery to look realistically to the future. Presbytery must be ready to name the reality and the stress, and to guide and/or promote rearrangements that could alleviate at least some of the coming circumstances. A difficulty, of course, is that, by design, the Presbytery is driven by the pastoral charges, and not the reverse.

We have found that there is more financial “difficulty” than before. Several pastoral charges are running close to the edge. It is remarkable, however, that in some of the smaller places there are funds in investments, or from recent bequests. Some of the larger congregations are also feeling the financial pressures of the times, especially with their apparent need to spend considerably on maintenance of large, older structures.

I make no apology for emphasizing what we do with the Annual Reports. We act on what, in the wisdom of those who have gone before us, is an instruction in the United Church Manual to examine and consider what is shown by the reports. Having worked with this mandate for many years, I will complete this report, which is my last (as my two terms as Chairperson come to an end), with a little of what we have been trying to promote for content in annual reports from pastoral charges. Annual Reports are historical documents; they are headed for the Archives of our Conference. As such, they must be identifiable with full names and locations of each church in the Pastoral Charge. There must be contact information. All names of people should be of both first and last names. Names of all members of the Board of Trustees of each congregation should be listed; remember that they constitute a legal body. In multi-point charges there needs to be description of what has happened in each of the congregations, not just their financial statements, important though they are. Consider why the congregations exist. Is it not that formal acts of worship can occur? Is it not appropriate to cherish those happenings and to report that they take place? Celebrate it with some permanent record of what has gone on!

A few years ago, the Pastoral Care and Support Committee of Woolastook Presbytery put out a one-page “Guide for Annual Reports”. I offer some quotations from that document.

“The Annual Report provides a snapshot of the year.

It shows that you are active and alive through your Sunday-by-Sunday worship, successes, significant events and milestones, etc.

It is a great communication document for members and adherents of your church.”

It “should tell a story of your church.”

“**Remember!** Keep the Spirit of God in your Annual Report, so that when people read it from cover to cover, they will know that God is alive and well and active in your church and EVERYTHING you do!”

Respectfully submitted,
Graham Powell, Chairperson,
Pastoral Care and Support Committee.